The Spider's Thread

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/5545184.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter
Additional Tags:	Angst, Time Travel, Episode: s03e13 The Wrath of the Lamb, Episode: s02e07 Yakimono, Vulnerable Hannibal, Post-Episode: s03e13 The Wrath of the Lamb, Angst with a Happy Ending, Sort of? - Freeform
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2015-12-27 Completed: 2016-01-04 Words: 18,031 Chapters: 10/10

The Spider's Thread

by SleepyOwls (arte)

Summary

"My compassion for you is inconvenient, Will."

Hannibal is the only one who survives the fall. He watches Will die in his arms.

Then, a single thread of a spider is dangled upon him in his time in Hell. He gets the chance to go back in time and spend one day and one day only with his love, Will Graham.

Will doesn't know what hits him.

Chapter 1

7:30 p.m.

Hair cut, shirts pressed, heavy coats draped across his arm- everything was set to echo Hannibal without being too obvious; Will carefully drew the line with no ties and loose buttons.

You are more in control now than you have ever been, Hannibal's voice rang clear in his mind. For once, that didn't bother him. This was his way in.

Taking a deep breath, Will rapped sharply against the door. He timed this moment precisely. It was 7:30 p.m. on the dot. He thought Hannibal would appreciate the punctuality.

He waited, and waited.

Nothing happened. The door remain closed.

For a second, Will wondered if Hannibal was not in the office, but he could hear the faint swell of classical music behind the door. Was Hannibal ignoring him? Slightly unnerved, Will stepped forward to knock one more time.

Before his knuckles could brush against the hard surface, the door flung open with enough force to make it hit the bookshelf, rattle the nearby picture frame into crashing, and swing back into Hannibal's waiting hand.

Will froze on the spot, never having expected so much *noise* from the office.

Hannibal stood in front of him, disarrayed, hand white knuckled against the door. His hair and clothes were as perfect as ever, but there was something frayed in his eyes. Uncharacteristic desperation clung to them.

"Will," Hannibal breathed, as if he was seeing a ghost.

Will didn't know how to react. He hadn't even known that Hannibal could be anything other than infuritatingly impeccable.

"Will," Hannibal said again, emotion filled to the brim and now freely spilling. His eyes roamed all over Will, drinking in his presence like a man finding oasis after long march across the desert. The coveting stare seemed to last forever before Hannibal finally closed his eyes, took a step back, and then another. "Please, come in."

His voice sounded shaky despite the obvious control the man was trying to exert over himself. Something had cracked Hannibal open. *Or*, Will thought somewhat desperately, *maybe this was all just an act*. Hannibal was supposed to be unpredictable in a predictable way and this wasn't like him. Not at all.

Will hesitated over the threshold, knowing that the one thing more dangerous than a predator was a cornered one. However, there was no way Will could tuck his tail between his legs and go back home empty handed. If Hannibal was acting strangely, he needed to know why.

Will stepped inside the office, feeling like he had been upstaged even before the curtain went up. Behind him, he could hear Hannibal shutting the door and fussing over the fallen items, which was clearly a ploy to buy more time. As Will also needed the time to regroup, he looked around the office instead of calling him out.

Red amidst the gray snagged his eyes, leading him to the broken glasses and spilled wine on the floor.

"Did I surprise you?" Will asked as he turned, although he couldn't imagine Hannibal doing something as pedestrian as dropping a glass in surprise.

"Hmm?" Hannibal asked, carefully adjusting the angle of the frame just so. He noticed Will's line of sight and said, "Ah, in a way."

Surprised by the admission, Will raised his brow. He didn't, however, ask any further questions. He was here to lure Hannibal in, not to discuss his butterfingers. Just the same, he couldn't help but feel a bit resentful. If Hannibal hadn't bursted into uncharacteristic emotionalism, the two of them would be well into the smooth game of cat and mouse by now. Will had painstakingly planned ahead for tonight's session, and now all he had was a shredded script.

"How may I help you tonight?" Hannibal asked, voice returned to its usual calmness. He appeared to be still obsessed with the frame.

Will considered his options.

"I'd like to resume my therapy," he said, going straight to the point.

Hannibal let go of the frame to straighten his jacket instead. He turned, meeting Will's eyes at last.

"One would say that's a peculiar request," Hannibal observed.

"I have to deal with you and my feelings about you. I thought it'd be best if I dealt with it directly."

"Yes, very reasonable," Hannibal said. Contemplatively he added, "However, if you want to resume your therapy, I have a condition."

"A condition?"

"You tried to kill me, Will. I have a reason to be precautious."

Will hadn't expected Hannibal to ask for more. The man had looked desperate to regain his friendship in the BSHCI after all.

In retrospect, he should've realized Hannibal would try to milk every situation for all its worth.

"What do you want?" Will asked, trying hard not to grit his teeth.

"Nothing strenuous," Hannibal said. "I just want you to spend the next 24 hours with me."

Will took a moment to mull over how absurd the request sounded.

"I tried to kill you, and you want me to stick around?"

"I've always been drawn to unorthodox therapy."

"What if I refuse?"

"Then I'd have to leave. Pack up and disappear."

Hannibal smiled at Will's disbelieving look, gentle as the Devil. There was no trace of the weakness that Will thought to have glimpsed a moment ago.

"The Chesapeake Ripper has been caught, Will. There's no obligation for me to help the case any further," Hannibal explained ever so calmly. "After all, I had been harassed by the FBI and almost died because of it. No one would blame me if I wanted to put everything behind and leave."

"You're sincere," Will numbly observed.

Hannibal nodded. "24 hours, that's all I ask."

Will's stomach knotted at the idea of Hannibal disappearing. It'd be one thing if Hannibal left, never to darken Will's doorstep again, but no, that would be too much to hope for. He knew that the shadow of Hannibal would haunt him until the inevitable day Hannibal would slip back into his life, at which point everyone else would be none the wise for the good doctor's true nature.

With a sinking feeling, Will realized that he should've killed Hannibal while he had the chance. Now, even if he were to kill Hannibal, he wouldn't be able to excise the part of himself that Hannibal had twisted. That part would only grow darker from the experience.

Will schooled his features.

"It's not like you to give an ultimatum, Dr. Lecter."

"Is it not?"

"You're usually more subtle than this. Ultimatum is for desperate men," Will said, cocking his head. "Are you one now, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal looked at him, fond and proud and something like dark torrent of water in his eyes. "You're dangerous, Will. I need to make sure."

"That you can still make me dance?"

"That I can withstand you for a full day."

Will didn't know which would be more unnerving, that Hannibal was faking his vulnerability, or that he was being truthful.

"I need to feed my dogs," Will said as a last ditch effort.

"We could eat dinner at my house, and drive to yours." Hannibal shrugged, the gesture incongruously casual on him. "I don't care where as long as you're with me."

Will closed his eyes and opened them again slowly.

"Alright," he said. It felt like striking a Devil's bargain.

But then again, when wasn't it when it concerned Hannibal Lecter?

Chapter 2

8:23 p.m.

"Any restaurant you want to recommend?"

That had been Will's response at finding himself in a lose-lose situation where he had to either give Hannibal the satisfaction of feeding him human meat or the pleasure of being invited back into the place the man himself had turned into a crime scene.

Frankly, when Will had made that comment, he hadn't hoped for much. After all, Hannibal had seemed all too ready to hit below the belt today. If it was what the doctor truly wanted, he would drag Will to his place one way or another. Will just hadn't wanted to make the process any easier.

Hannibal, however, had looked at him like he had the most beautiful idea ever after the initial look of disappointment, and had proceeded to make a phone call right then and there.

That was why Will was here now in a restaurant furnished with rich red and cream, candle lights bright and music warm. To his surprise, it wasn't one of those snobby places where one had to be dressed in tux to even set a foot in the doorstep, but it sure wasn't a place one could just casually drop by. There were people everywhere.

"Well, well, if it isn't the famous Dr. Lecter," A blond woman with deep laugh lines greeted them upon their entrance.

"Caroline," Hannibal smiled. "Thanks for having me in such a short notice."

"Well, I had to, didn't I? I have to make you cook less," Caroline said drily, one hand on her hip. "You know how many people cancelled their reservations to attend your dinner party?"

"I didn't mean to be an inconvenience," Hannibal demurred. Will resisted the urge to slap that expression off his face.

"Oh, you love it and you know it," Caroline said, her eyes sliding off to Will. If she'd seen his face splashed all over the newspaper as that guy who threw up an ear in his sink, she didn't show it. Will was pretty impressed by her ability to conjure up a friendly smile, because he was sure that the way he'd been glaring at Hannibal would've been enough for anyone to call the police.

"You've never been here before, have you?" Caroline asked with a polite interest.

Will stopped himself from shrugging and responded with, "I'm more of a product food guy."

Will mentally kicked himself in the shin. The next time he wanted to come across as polite, he'd better start shrugging instead of opening his mouth. Thankfully, Caroline took things in stride.

"Well then, you're in for a treat," she said, and guided them to the one empty seat in the corner.

Once sitted, Will took the menu and stared at the list of food with unnecessarily long names. He was tempted to order the most expensive thing in the house, but thought that Hannibal would probably get a kick out of it and chose the cheepest three-course meal instead. It wasn't long before he got annoyed with himself for letting Hannibal dictate his food choice, but he wasn't going to make more fool out of himself by hastily recanting his order.

"I'll have the same," Hannibal said, sending him a knowing look.

Caroline regarded them with a raised brow - a bit exasperatedly at Hannibal - but didn't make any comment. Will let Hannibal go wild on their wine choice since he felt guilty about being cheap when she went to all this trouble for them.

"I'm surprised that you didn't order elaborate six-course meals before I could say anything," Will commented after Caroline disappeared, guilt still lingering.

"I thought about it, then I thought we could spend more time in my house after a short dinner."

Apparently, Will should've stuck to his first choice. He drummed his fingers against the table, wondering when that wine would come.

"What were you originally going to feed me?" he asked, a way to remind Hannibal that he wouldn't stop throwing a wrench at each and every one of his plan.

"Kokoretsi with heart, liver, and lungs if possible," Hannibal frowned. "It depends on what's left in my pantry."

"You're telling me you don't know?"

"My memory only goes so far, Will," Hannibal smiled as if he was sharing a private joke. "My memory palace is filled with more important things than tracking down what ingredient I have at each given moment."

"Food is important to you," incredulous, Will pointed out.

"Yes."

Will waited, but no elaboration came.

"Is it more important to you who's on your table than what's in your pantry?" Will offered his best guess, but he knew that it was nowhere near correct.

Hannibal's smile widen indulgently. "Company is everything."

Will was unimpressed. Hannibal could do better than being deliberately obtuse. Will returned the smile humorlessly.

"Then I believe our next stop would be McDonald's, Dr. Lecter."

The appalled look he received in return was more than gratifying. Will began to relax for the first time since this ill-fated dinner had started. "Really, how do you choose them?"

Will's question, curious and free of snark, had an unexpected effect on the man in front of him. The theatrically wounded look on his face deepened into something more jagged and visceral, only to be soon hidden away by his raised hand. He looked just like the day he had knelt beside Will and faked his grief for Abigail. The only difference was that this time, the loss of control came unrehearsed.

Will's fingers twitched, wanting to reach out, and his stomach soured at the realization. He didn't know whether to be angry or relived that his first instinct was to console.

While Will was frozen with indecision, Hannibal gathered himself, breathing in deeply and hiding his mouth behind his hand before sliding it off to his laps.

"I thought you already knew," Hannibal murmurred, almost impossible to hear among the happy, oblivious chattering of the people surrounding them.

"What a disappointment I turn out to be," Will murmurred back just as quitely.

"Never," came the firm answer.

Hannibal appeared almost surprised at his own reply.

Right at that moment, the waiter came to their table with impeccable timing, bearing one bottle of white wine and two bowls of rich robster soup. Will listened to the waiter's explanation about the food with only half an ear - closer to quarter, to be honest - as he was on the verge of snatching the wine and drinking it straight from the bottle.

When the pang of alcohol finally hit his tongue, Will had to remind himself that it was probably not wise to get drunk in front of Hannibal, especially this unpredictable one.

With great reluctance, Will put his glass down and caught Hannibal staring at him almost wistfully.

Hannibal inclined his glass, as if he wanted to ask for a toast. He said, "Whenever feasible, I believe one should always try to eat the rude."

Free range rude, any other time, Will would have retorted so snidely. Rudeness, for God's sake. No wonder the vicitims appeared to have been chosen at random.

However, something didn't sit right with Will for him to be dismissive. Hannibal- if there was one thing that Will had figured out about Dr. Lecter during his long stay in the cell, it was that the man loved slipping in jokes about his true nature whenever possible.

Hannibal wasn't enjoying this now. He was reciting lines.

Will shook his head. In a moment of weakness, he lifted his drink. He took comfort in the fact that Hannibal didn't seem to have anticipated this move.

Clink, the noise was clear as a bell.

Might as well have one thing clear tonight.

9:41 p.m.

"Mine or yours?" Hannibal asked as they stepped out of the restaurant.

Will stopped. "What?"

"We do need to spend the night somewhere. My house or yours?"

"I thought we'd at least sleep separately."

"I was being quite literal when I asked for 24 hours."

"First time for everything," Will muttered, displeased but not enough to open up an argument.

If possible, Will would have chosen to go home, staying up all night to make sure that Hannibal wouldn't sniff around his house. But his body was already exhausted from his stay in BSHCI, and depriving himself of more sleep while he had to deal with Hannibal for many more hours was not a smart move.

Not that being unconscious around Hannibal was a smart move either, but he was reasonably certain that Hannibal would want him conscious and functioning while he unleashed his nefarious plan.

While Will was contemplating, Hannibal thanked the valet boy and got into his car.

"You have a guest room ready?" Will asked as he closed the door behind him.

"You can sleep in mine," Hannibal answered, blasé.

Will paused, looked back on the last two hours.

"Is that what you want? A date?"

Hannibal tilted his head. "That sounds so banal."

Will huffed. *Banal*, of course that was his problem. "What do you call it to yourself, then?"

Hannibal opened his mouth, then closed it again, stumped.

Will stared.

Words always came to Dr. Lecter easily, flourishing like a living thing.

Hannibal quirked his lips into a self-depreciating smile. "I guess I have to settle for banal."

A new car entered the restaurant at the moment, briefly throwing light across Hannibal's face. His eyes shone red, for once reminding Will of an open wound instead of a predator in waiting.

"Who do you see?"

"Pardon?"

"I'm not your golden ticket," Will observed, slow and conflicted. "Why are you dragging me around?"

Hannibal stared at him, that oddly proud, dark torrent of a look again. Wordlessly, he pulled his gaze away, fixed the mirror. He started the engine.

"I promise I would keep my hands to myself," he said as he pulled them to the road.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

3:12 a.m.

Will woke up with heavy weight on his chest, air rushing in his ears indicating that he was near the edge of the bed.

Disoriented, he blinked, smelling wine mixed with the familiar spicy scent. It took a moment for him to realize that a) something was literally on his chest, and b) that something was Hannibal Lecter's head. Thankfully, it felt like it was still attached to its body. Will wasn't in the mood to clean up blood in the moonlight.

"Didn't you promise to keep your hands to yourself?" Will asked, voice heavy with sleep. He hadn't slept so well for a long time. Since he went straight to bed after they'd arrived at the house and gave no opportunity whatsoever for Hannibal to drug him, he concluded that it must be because of Hannibal's bed that could've been made of a slice of heaven.

"I am," Hannibal said, muffled.

"Your head doesn't count as your hands?"

"Of course."

"What about knives?"

Silence.

"No," Hannibal answered.

I probably should feel more alarmed about this, Will thought as his memory of yesterday got clearer. He remembered falling asleep, trying to wrestle his plan to fit within the new parameter of him not being the golden ticket. Maybe he once was, but not anymore. Or maybe he'd always been the secondary one to the primary goal.

Whatever it was, the most important golden ticket was gone now and not by Hannibal's design, judging by the way he'd behaved.

Will wondered what Garret Jacob Hobbs would have done if someone else had gotten to Abigail first before he could.

"How are you going to kill me?" Will asked, feeling oddly calm and centered. Maybe it was the dark, knowing that the monster was already here. No need to run.

"I was going to slit your throat," Hannibal confessed, easy as water. "You wouldn't have felt a thing. Blood gushing out before you could wake up."

It felt a bit ridiculous how Hannibal was just opening up when Will had a whole plan set up to lure him into the light. If Will had a recorder in his hand at the moment, he could've been done with his job then and there.

He wasn't thinking of a recorder now.

"Why?" Will asked, curious. Curiousity was infectious. "You want your victims to know exactly what you're doing. How they're going to be... elevated."

Will could see Hannibal's hand stretching toward his face as his eyes adjusted to the darkness. The fingers splayed as if to cup his cheek, then receded, laying on the pillow instead.

"You're already perfect, Will," Hannibal sighed, keeping his promise. Will felt like he was breathing in Hannibal's sigh, taking it straight from his lungs. "I didn't want to kill you so soon," Hannibal said, "But I knew I was going to need all day to eat as much of you as possible."

Oh, Will thought. That explained why Hannibal had eaten so sparingly in the restaurant, giving most parts to Will.

Will swallowed. The fingers were less than an inch away from his cheek, drawing feathery lines on the pillow. He wanted to lean into them, the glint of the rail beckoning him to jump.

"What's the rush?" Will asked.

"Soon, I'm going to be too injured to eat you."

"Are you planning something dangerous?"

"Define danger," Hannibal said. Will could hear him smiling. Which was fair enough, considering the man's hobbie was feeding the evidence of his crime to the head of the investigation.

"What changed your mind?" Will asked. The fingers stopped.

"I wanted to hear your heart beating one last time," Hannibal said, his voice going soft. "I didn't want it to stop."

Where was light when you needed it? At that moment, that was all Will wanted. He wanted light to flood in so that he could see Hannibal, to know if his looks matched his voice, loving, awed, splayed open and vulnerable. His imagination wasn't good enough to paint Hannibal with softness and warmth, infused with the glimpse of vulnerability he had seen through out the day.

It wasn't going to happen, of course. Will knew what happened when Psyche lit the lamp. This Hannibal wasn't made for light.

Will reached out, sliding his hand through the soft hair until it landed at the back of Hannibal's nape. Hannibal was so still. He had stopped breathing.

Although Will had no idea what he was doing, Hannibal seemed to know what to do. When Will gave a weak squeeze over the neck, Hannibal raised his head up, obliging. There was no longer weight over his chest. Feeling too light all of a sudden, Will used Hannibal's shoulder as a leverage and pushed himself up.

Hannibal was kneeling by the side of the bed. Will, sitted up, could see the top of his head. Wool scratched his palm. Hannibal was wearing a sweater. This was something new. Will couldn't bear not knowing.

He scooted closer, closer, until he had Hannibal's face cradled between his hands, fingers tracing over the fine brows, the high cheekbones, the arch of his mouth, searching, searching.

Hannibal's hand shot up to clutch at Will's wrist, forgetting himself. Will let him take it without a fuss and explored the shell of Hannibal's ear with his free hand, circled his thumb around the stubbled jaw, and made his way down to the bared throat. Hannibal's throat was working, strained and convulsive, but no sound was coming out.

It seemed natural to lean down and kiss that soundless mouth.

For a few seconds, Hannibal was utterly slack, open but not really there. Will nibbled and licked, waiting 'till Hannibal would show himself. Hannibal came alive with a strangled groan, looping his left arm around Will's neck and pulling him close, pulling him down.

Will spread his hands over Hannibal's shoulder, and digged his fingers in until he could put enough distance between them and not topple over.

He waited until Hannibal strained up to follow him and swooped down, his position more comfortable now. He licked inside of Hannibal's mouth, his hand back on Hannibal's cheek. He could feel him quivering inside out. Will felt like he could do this forever, explore every way Hannibal ticked.

Unfortunately, the need for breathing was too great. They had to separate themselves, hands still clinging to each other. The only sound that could be heard from the room was the sound of their shared breathing- harsh, irregular, slow to settle down.

That brief break, however, was enough for what was left of Will's sanity to ramble back. It asked him what the hell had just happened.

"A clutch for balance," Will whispered, not really aware of what he was saying.

Hannibal made a low, keening noise at the back of his throat. He brought their foreheads together, leaning in heavily as if he wanted to crawl inside Will's head and never come back out again.

Will stayed still, disoriented at his own action.

"I- better go," Hannibal said, his voice thick. He somehow found the strength to let go and stand up again. "You can come out whenever you want to."

Hannibal fled the room. There was no other word for it. Will didn't feel much of anything, nothing even remotedly approaching being smug.

Will felt bereft without his warmth.

Chapter End Notes

I just realized that Hannibal probably wouldn't have been able to eat Will with his stomach injury and things just got.. out of control x)

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

4:06 a.m.

Lucky for Will, Hannibal's room had a bathroom adjacent to it. Will had given himself a quick, cold shower and changed back into his original clothes, hoping he'd wake up enough for rationalization to kick in.

Which was too much to hope for.

Sighing, Will returned to the room. He folded the pajamas Hannibal had lent him and put them on the nightstand. He turned to eye the door. After spending weeks behind the bars, the last thing Will wanted was to be boxed in, but he wasn't ready to go out and face Hannibal or the world. Feeling fidgety, Will decided that he might make the bed as well.

Will straightened out the bedsheet as he went around the bed. Doing so, he found something he had missed on the other nightstand- a scalpel.

Its shape was familiar since he had seen it often enough, on Hannibal's desk, ostensibly only used to sharpen his pencils. For all Will knew, it could've been one of many scalpels that Hannibal had stashed around in places, but he had a feeling that this one was from the office, his death already a foregone conclusion at that point. It'd have amused Hannibal to think of their dinner as the Last Supper.

Will hissed as pain entered his conscious mind. He had nicked himself without meaning to. Blood beaded at the end of his index finger. He quickly brought it to his mouth, sucking in the coppery taste that felt overpowering.

There was a smudge of blood left on the scalpel. Will watched light scattering around it and imagined slicing it across Hannibal's throat, just as Hannibal had wanted to do to him.

His survival alone was the proof that Hannibal's control was being compromised. That much was gratifying, though the fact that he was getting swept away by Hannibal's loss of control wasn't. Last night felt like a pocket universe where it had operated under its own separate logic.

Will put the scalpel down. He looked around the place, wanting to distract himself. He guessed he could always start with the books, but stopped, an idea stricking him.

Hannibal's closet loomed large in front of him. Will fancied that Narnia could fit in there. There was no such thing as messy pile of coats though. Everything was meticulously categorized to the point where even Will could figure out where each item would be stored. He opened the small drawer inside to find neatly folded pocket handkerchiefs. He dragged

the whole drawer out to better see and selected the red and blue one. He put the rest of them back to where it belonged.

When he wiped the blood away, wrapped the scalpel with the red and blue fabric and pocketed it in his jacket, it all felt like a thing to do.

4:21 a.m.

Will came down stairs to the scent of coffee. He padded toward the kitchen and found a cup of coffee on the counter. He touched it and found it to be still warm.

He took one sip - sweet and black - and went in search of Hannibal.

He found Hannibal sitting in front of the fireplace, cradling a mug between his palms.

"How did you know when I'd come down?" Will asked, sitting down on the empty chair beside Hannibal.

"I had my hope," was the mysterious answer.

Will observed Hannibal closely in search of a clue. The man looked remarkably put together, like he hadn't been trembling an hour ago. Maybe his hair was a bit disarrayed than usual, his red sweater a bit too casual. But he didn't look like someone who could get desperatly lost in the moment, the fire warming his skin only a parody of passion.

"I didn't know when I'd be coming out," Will said.

Hannibal's face went distant. "I believe you."

A part of Will wanted to demand explanation. Another part of him wasn't so keen on the idea. *Why did you make the first move, Will?*

"What are you thinking now?" Will asked, staring at the fire rather than his companion. He pretended that he could calculate the pattern of the jumping light.

"Do you know the story of the spider's thread, Will?" Hannibal asked after the crackling silence.

"The spider's thread that wasn't strong enough to lift the sinner from the Hell?"

Hannibal quirked his lips. "It might have been, if other sinners hadn't tried to drag him down."

"It might have been, If the sinner had tried to save everyone's skin instead of just his own."

"An act of compassion," Hannibal tilted his head. "Which leads the spider's thread to Hell."

Will wondered what kind of message Hannibal was trying to send. The story didn't suit him. If not stepping on a spider counted as an act of compassion, wasn't everybody practing it daily by not murdering others whenever the urge aroused?

"What are you in this story?" Will asked, confused but playing along. "The sinner, or the spider's thread?"

Hannibal smirked, absentmindedly sipping his coffee. "Do you believe I could be the reward for your compassion?"

"I don't think compassion is what moves you."

That little comment was what made Hannibal look at him for the first time since the incident. Will ought to have felt like snapping into focus, the way he usually did when Hannibal directed his full attention on him. Instead, he now felt pale. There was a ghost sitting between them, the unknown golden ticket that had thrown Hannibal's world upside down. Will couldn't see its face, but the ghost had one hand on Hannibal's chest, sinking in.

Hannibal flicked his eyes down as if he could feel what the ghost was doing and approved.

"It's inconvenient," he said, sounding terribly fond. "However, there's something freeing about knowing you're damned whichever way you choose. I think I can understand you at last."

You're projecting, Will wanted to snap, but bit it down. "What do you understand?"

"You have an unique ability to walk both roads of the crossroad without betraying yourself," Hannibal said, laying down the truth of Will Graham in so many words. *No forts in the bone arena of your skull for things you love.* "Everything that can happen happens. You always choose without choosing."

"An interesting idea."

Hannibal leaned back, smiling. "If nothing else, I'm pleased with the rare opportunity to be you."

Will wondered why. He was nothing but miserable in his skin. The question if he was Hannibal's rebound breifly floated to his mind, but he was quick to push it away.

"What two roads are you walking on?" Will tried a more practical question.

"The same as yours, I believe. I wonder what my spider's thread can take," Hannibal put the coffee on the small table between them and steepled his fingers over his crossed leg. "My teacup is already broken, so the load might be light enough."

"I'm not broken," Will said, unbidden, their first meeting still fresh in his mind.

The look in Hannibal's eyes were too close to reverence for Will's comfort. "No, you aren't," Hannibal murmured.

Will was about to break into hives before Hannibal smirked and mercufully suggested early breakfast.

-

Hannibal's kitchen had everything, be it vegetable, rare spice, beverage, diary. The only thing it didn't have was meat of any kind.

"I know a place which opens for all hours," Hannibal explained. "I stocked my kitchen while you were asleep."

"And you happened to throw out all the meat?"

"I thought I'd have a large amount of meat in my hand by the time I was done," Hannibal said, nonchalant. Will shifted, feeling like the scalpel in his jacket was digging inside him. "I threw out everything so that you'd be the only one here."

If Hannibal had wanted to be praised for his thoughtfulness, Will wasn't going to give it to him.

They decided to make Spanish omelettes for their breakfast. Will was tasked with cutting potatoes and onions. He hadn't expected his first taste of Hannibal's cooking after the revelation to be of a meat-free dish, but that was universe for you. For once, he was happy to not be the butt of the joke.

"How do you plan to walk down your two roads?" Will asked, cutting the potatoes into thick slices.

"I thought I'll see where you'll lead me. You're the expert, after all."

"No one can lead you."

"Weren't you planning to?" Hannibal asked, eyes piercing. Will was curious as to how much he knew, but there was no point in asking.

Will became a tad bit harder on his potatoes. "Plans often deviate."

"What would you do if they ddn't?"

Will stopped. "Would you confess all your crime to everyone?" He asked sarcastically.

Hannibal remained insufferably calm. "I'd rather not interact with Jack Crawfords and the others in my promised hours."

"I could get you a recorder."

"That'd hardly be effective, don't you think?" Hannibal asked, somehow managing to make beating eggs into a graceful art. Will watched the delicate wrist moving in circles. "You have a history of putting me at a gunpoint. Blackmail would be a convenient excuse for me."

"You'd hardly frame me twice," Will said, annoyed. He wondered if the onions would make Hannibal cry.

"I'm just pointing out the holes in your plan, Will," Hannibal said, abandoning the eggs for a moment to heat the oil in a large frying pan. Will waited until Hannibal gave him the signal,

then slowly put the cut pieces of vegetable into the pan. He stepped back to watch Hannibal stir the ingredient.

It all felt absurdly domestic.

"I'm going home after this," Will declared.

Hannibal didn't even look at him.

"As you wish."

Chapter End Notes

God please give me strength to continue writing about these chatty assholes. Their dialogue doubled during editing. Anyway, thanks for all the folks who are reading this!

Chapter 5

5:52 a.m.

Since it was Wolf's Trap they were heading to, they got into Will's car. Will didn't ask Hannibal how he was planning to return home later. Will was kicking the man out of his house the moment the clock striked 7:30 p.m.

Hannibal had dressed lightly for their travel, a dark coat over a simple light gray sweater. Will kept glancing at his passenger. Hannibal without his three-piece suit looked like a panda without rings around its eyes.

"I did not know you had such a keen sense of fashion," Hannibal said, amused at Will's attempt at stealthy looks. Will wasn't trying to be. He simply didn't have the luxury to study his companion with constant, unrelenting stare like Hannibal had been doing because he didn't want to crash his car.

"Is this a part of your creepy plan to be me?"

"Sweaters are comfortable."

"So are track pants."

"Are we to play dress up, Will?"

"I'm surprised you didn't pack for that."

What Hannibal packed instead was one third of his kitchen. Will had to relent when the man asked him what was in his house. Between Chilton fumbling in and the need to set his plan rolling, there hadn't been much time for grocery.

"I don't think you have it in you," Will said.

"To dress lightly?"

"To walk down two roads at the same time." Will risked taking his eyes off the road long enough to see Hannibal's face smoothing down. "You always know exactly what you want."

"I have my curiosity."

"You're curious if people would follow the goal you've set up for them," Will corrected him. "You're not made to be neutral."

Hannibal shifted in his seat. Will pictured a snake peaking its head between the rocks. "What is my goal for you, then?"

The stag man rising from the stream. *You're alone because you're unique.* The shadow sinking into blood. The heart beating too loud in his pillow. The ghost with a veil drawn upon

its face.

"I thought I knew," Will said. His clothes had become somewhat wrinkled overnight, but it didn't hide the care that had been put into it. "But then you changed."

"Like I changed you?"

The question triggered a phantom sensation of horns bursting through his back. Will remembered the quiet sense of power which had lulled his horror into quiet, made his fingertips steady as they realigned the world. He remembered tipping Hannibal's head toward him with similar certainty, knowing that he'd be let in, that he wouldn't be stopped. Darkness was a place where reality was so easy to repaint. It was only in daylight that Will recognized the third ghost that had been between them, making Hannibal pliant.

The driver's seat felt like a slide under a microscpe.

"No, not like you changed me," Will said, his eyes unwillingly sliding toward his passenger.

Hannibal looked at him like he didn't know if he liked that answer or not.

7:01 a.m.

The dogs swam toward him the moment he opened the door. Will knelt down, hugging and patting them all, feeling like balance had finally been restored. His joy deemed somewhat when they greeted Hannibal in a similar fashion, milling around excitedly.

"I'm sorry, you must be hungry," he told Winston, who remained loyally by his side. Will ruffled his furry head, and stood up to fetch food. When the other dogs caught up to his plan and scrabbled to follow, Will turned and sternly said, "Stay."

They stayed. Perhaps because Hannibal was providing them entertainment. Will felt comforted by the fact dog fur would end up sticking all over Hannibal's expensive clothing.

Will put the food bowls down and called them. The dogs abandoned Hannibal in heart beat.

"You make your dogs' food from scratch," Hannibal commented as he walked to stand beside Will, his pace sedate.

"You know that already."

"Yet your kitchen is most likely to be empty."

"I have my priorities straight."

Hannibal gave him a sidelong smile. "I missed seeing you with your dogs." His eyes wandered off to where Will's bed lay. Morning lights were seeping in, narrow between curtains.

"What do you see when I'm with them?"

"Your heart." *Wistful.*

Will imagined pushing Hannibal down the counter, scalpel plunging in too fast for him to react. Hannibal would recognize his own scalpel as it opened him up from his clavicle to his stomach, Y section for live autopsy.

"You want to take it from me," Will said, composing himself.

Hannibal's gaze flickered toward his chest. Will wondered if he could see through his jacket and the bundle of red and blue under it.

"Do I?" Hannibal said. He put his hands in his pockets. "What do you do in your off days?"

Not the smoothest change of subject, but Will let him.

"I don't have them often."

"Now you do."

Will made an unimpressed sound. Shockingly enough, the Bureau had wanted to keep Will away from the impressionable young minds of the Academy despite him being pronounced not so guilty.

"Thank you for my unemployment."

"They'll find your talent necessary again," Hannibal said as if it was the obvious truth. "You should enjoy your vacation in the meanwhile."

Will hmmed. "And let you take advantage of it."

"I'll be your spice of a company."

"You'll burn through my palate," Will said dryly, then considered the subject for real. He still had twelve hours to go through with Hannibal and they needed to something beside fiddling their thumbs. "I don't do much. I read. I fish. I fix boat engines."

"You can teach me how."

"What, fishing? Fixing boats?"

Hannibal shrugged. "Why not?"

Will paused. It was difficult to imagine the doctor getting anywhere near dirty oil. Hannibal was extremely fussy when it came to his cleanliness. He was a bit like a cat. Will was sure that the man had found a way to remain pristine even when he was setting up his murder tableaux.

Suitability or not, Will wanted to object on the simple ground that Hannibal had come up with the idea, but he couldn't think of a better counter offer. Afterall, if he had to take his doses of Hannibal, he'd rather have him out of his elements. Will had spent all his night in

Hannibal's territory- in his office, in his fancy restaurant and in his house. A change of scenery was necessary.

"Why not?" Will repeated.

Chapter 6

7:57 a.m.

Taking mercy on Hannibal's lack of changeable clothes, Will decided against engine works that could get truly messy.

"What are we going to do?" Hannibal asked, his eyes brushing along every inch of the shed.

"Just some basic maintenance."

Will walked around the controlled chaos of the environment and found something suitable to tinker with. He hefted the engine up and unceremoniously thrusted it into Hannibal's arms. To his credit, Hannibal only let out a tiny grunt before he adjusted himself to the weight.

"Take it home and leave it on the floor," Will instructed. "I'll be along with tools and repair parts."

Hannibal nodded and left.

Later, when Will nudged the door open with his shoulder and came back into the house, he found that Hannibal had made himself home in front of Will's mattress, coat hanging by the kitchen chair and clad only in his sweater. Will raised his brow at him.

"You usually fix them here, don't you?" Hannibal said.

"How did you know?"

"The dent in the carpet."

"Of course," Will said, thinking of the state of his carpet. Staring at Hannibal's creased black pants reminded him that he was in one of his best clothes as well. "Well, I'm gonna save my clothes at least," he said and put down the tool box on the floor. He took one of his plaid shirts and jeans and changed in the bathroom.

Hannibal sure knew how to amuse himself in Will's absence. He had spread every tool that had been in the box in front of him, from the smallest to largest in two neat rows.

"Do you perchance have OCD?" Will asked.

"It's easier to see everything at once when things are orderly," Hannibal answered. He patted the spot next to him. "Come and explain. What are these and what are they for?"

Will side-eyed him for a bit but relented, sitting next to him. Will purposefully used his dullest, most monotonous voice as he explained, the one that caused his students' lids to gain new weight and their heads to rock and roll like zombies.

Hannibal didn't fall for his trap. In fact, he was a surprisingly good student. He was attentive and focused, clarifying matters with his questions, proding Will for better information when needed to, but not taking over. What started out as a simple explanation melted into demonstration, and practice. Soon, Hannibal and Will were both lying on their stomachs, the engine between them.

"You're surprisingly good at this," Will commented as Hannibal removed the wire plugs under Will's guidance. "I thought you won't let anyone boss you around."

"I was a resident once, Will," Hannibal said, voice dry. "Being bossed around was basically my job description."

"You would have found the way around it," Will said. And for the first time since their acquaintance, he found himself earnestly wondering what Hannibal was like in his youth, in the long years before he appeared in Will's life. Hannibal lived his life as if he was constantly performing for grand and graceful opera, and Will, who had suddenly found himself dragged on to the stage and under spot light, had been too busy dealing with props and lights and music to wonder about what was behind the curtain. And then the music had suddenly changed, causing his eyes to wander.

Will tried to imagine Hannibal with his face more smooth and round, maybe just younger and sharper, limbs coltishly awkward as his feline grace had yet to be formed.

"What are you thinking?" Hannibal asked.

"That you'd have been a terror if you were one of my students."

"I could've been a charmer for you," Hannibal said, almost flirting.

Will ignored the tone. "You'd have tried to test me. Drive me insane with purposefully long essays."

"Learning is an experience shared by a teacher and a student. Shouldn't teachers be challenged to better themselves?"

"Oh, sure. Is that what you always did to your teachers?"

"Only to those who were worth it," Hannibal said. "Most would just remember me as the good student."

"What did you do to those who you considered valuable enough?"

Their talk continued, weaving in and out between the topics of teachers and engines and other related and unrelated things, small pieces of life, and Will realized that they were *chatting*. He wasn't thinking about heavy symbolisms and metaphors behind the words, or was he worrying about his job or his sanity. They were being idle, like a couple of kids on a sleepover.

Will made himself not to think too much. He could worry and feel stressed literally at any other time. Reprieve was rare to come and he needed recharging before another wave of

trouble came crushing in.

12: 02 p.m.

In a plot twist that Will hadn't foreseen, the reprieve hadn't ended with the engine fixed. It lasted as they'd walked the dogs and gone out to fish. Will didn't think Hannibal would be able to resist a good fishing metaphor, but maybe it had been too easy even for a man who was a walking, talking cannibalism puns (*It rhymes*, was the most absurd, painful, hilarious realization he'd ever had, to be in on the joke that only two people in the world shared, a joke that made him look crazy when he told others how not funny it was).

It was only when they were tidying up the place to go home with two trouts in their ice box that it hit Will that the last person with whom he'd fished together was Abigail, only not really because she was gone.

"Will?" Hannibal turned as the shuffling sound behind him stopped. He had a charcoal muffler around his neck, which Will had lent him because he hadn't wanted to deal with sniffles.

"Why did you do it?" Will asked, feeling nauseous in his spot. The wind felt like a knife against his cheeks. "You cared about her as much as I did."

Hannibal was quiet, his eyes bright. Will wanted to gauge them out because he had no right.

"I thought I was- causterizing the wound," Hannibal confessed softly.

I found a pattern and now I'm going to reconstruct his thinking, Will remembered his fevered talk in the office, the moment he had inadvertently drawn the knife too close to Hannibal's neck, and subsequently to Abigail's. And Hannibal chose Hannibal.

"She was inconvenient to your survival," Will said, hollow, hating that he saw the neat symmetry of a girl who should've died by her father's hand dying by the ghost of her father, more appealing than the stark fact that she was unfortunate enough to attract the attention of two serial killers.

"...Yes," Hannibal answered with difficulty, but it wasn't enough.

"Why am I alive?" Will asked, because there was another neat symmetry: The ghost of her father dying with her, as her father would have in the first place.

Hannibal lifted the ice box from the ground, ready to leave. "Would you rather be dead?"

"I'd rather she be alive," Will said, watching his breath disappearing with a puff. Steady white clouded Hannibal's mouth. "She deserved better than us."

They kept to themselves on the way back to the house.

1:32 p.m.

Lunch was prepared separately. They each got one trout to cook. Will opted for simple fry, not having any energy for something more complicated.

He ate alone while Hannibal was still busy in the kitchen. Hannibal had brought his own utensil. Will tried not to look at Hannibal while he was bringing his dishes to the sink, and found the trout staring at him with its tail peeking out of its mouth.

"Do you feel like puking?" Will asked, snide.

Hannibal didn't rise to the bait. "I was thinking of time," he said steadily as he wiped his hand on the towel.

"Regret doesn't undo time."

"We're stuck and knotted," Hannibal said. "We can never go back to the stream we started out from."

"We're too changed."

Hannibal had his sleeves rolled up to cook. His wrists were exposed, as were the scars that hadn't looked so prominent in another kitchen. Will leaned against the sink, and watched Hannibal carrying the dish to the table to eat.

"What did you make the night you killed her?" Will asked. When Hannibal looked back, one hand pulling the chair out, Will added, "This is what you do when you're upset."

Hannibal sat down. He cut a piece of flesh with his knife. "I wasn't in a place to cook that night. I had to wait," he said. "I skinned a man alive, cut his limbs off and knotted him into a heart."

Will blinked at Hannibal's frank description.

"You look surprised," Hannibal said, amused.

"I didn't expect you to be this honest."

"I'm always honest in my own way."

"You lie when it's more convenient," Will rebuked.

"Aren't we past convenience?" Hannibal asked.

Something niggled at the back of his mind. Will walked toward the table, more for the need to pace than to sit.

"You weren't as half as forthcoming when I had a gun pointed at your head."

"You weren't ready."

"I'm now?" Will said, pivoting on his heel, one hand against the back of the chair facing Hannibal. "I came to your office the day after I almost shot you."

"You're as ready as it could be."

Will leaned into the chair. "Or you're just getting impatient."

Hannibal hid behind his fork, chewing, swallowing. "Do you feel hastened?"

"I think you're keep looking back as you walk in front of me."

"I'm going where you lead me."

"Yes," Will said, looking down at the half eaten fish eating its own tail. "You told me that."

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

2:30 p.m.

Hannibal was standing in rich forest, where trees that he had long burnt down stood strong and the seeds that he had just thrown were yet to grow. *5 hours left,* the wind through the leafs whispered, echoing like church collapses and fluttering wings, the elegant sound of breathless cruelty.

With each of his steps the forest thinned, and the cliff he was standing on was high. He felt a hand snagging him from behind and turning him so that he could see blood shining black under the moonlight. *It's beautiful,* Hannibal heard, and as his body tipped he knew without a doubt that everything that had led to this moment was real. Nothing this beautiful could've happened without his Will by his side.

Something jostled his elbow. The rushing of ocean turned into water falling from a tap, abruptly stopping as a pale, tapered hand turned the knob. Hannibal was standing in front of a sink which was dangerously close to overflowing. His arms were submerged more than half way up to his elbows.

"I've never seen you lost," the voice made him turn. When their eyes met, the deep blues told him that they both knew the words to be a lie. Hannibal felt a ghostly hand over his neck squeezing and had to suppress a shiver. This Will was still in chrysallis; his forehead was clear of any scars, but he was no less full of surprises, no less real. Hannibal didn't spend much time asking himself what was real, if there was a way to lengthen the hours he had been given. The worst thing he could do was wasting his time with Will with useless speculations that couldn't be tested or proven.

It was almost amusing, how Will had bound his hands into meekly following God's plan even in his absence.

Will was studying him, leaning against the sink, right hand so near Hannibal's elbow. Will's thumb was on the outside of the rim but the other four fingers were inside, collecting water drops. The index finger moved up and down, rubbing against steel. Hannibal could hear Will's head ticking, still wondering, still dithering. Will never knew what he was going to do until the moment came. *5 hours left,* and although he wanted to see what Will's beautiful mind would come up with, Hannibal was half tempted to make the moment to come.

It'd be easy. There was a syringe inside of his coat pocket. He could take it out while Will went to bathroom, put him into sleep and slit his throat, just as planned, and get drenched under the illuminating flow of arterial blood.

Or he could let Will fight 'till his end. Hannibal would feel the last of Will's breath leaving as the wounds that Will's teeth and nails and fists left on his body throbbed in tandem with his

heartbeat. There would still be enough time to pry open Will's rib cage and crawl inside, heart in his mouth, and there was still Abigail to think of, her distressed voice saying *Then it's just murder isn't it,* and he couldn't let-

Hannibal's thoughts abruptly derailed as a hand encircled his wrist. Will's hand had followed his hand under water and was pulling it up. Water churned and spilled over as their combined weight moved.

"Is it okay to have them wet like this?" Will asked, his thumb on the puckered and raw scar. The pressure was delicious.

Complicated words eluded him for a moment. "Yes," Hannibal answered

"You almost died," Will said, tone contemplative.

"By your design."

"Yes," Will said, pulling his arm further up. Hannibal's eyes were dragged along, from Will's blunt nails threatening to put crescent marks on him to piercing eyes that made him feel transparent. "Who killed me?"

Will's eyes were tracking every tic in his body. They left a burning track in the wake of them; the seeds he thought to be dormant bursted into colors, blinding. It was impossible to see the whole picture when each stroke was so intense.

"You once told me that words are living things," said Will. Hannibal wrestled to concentrate. "They have personality, point of view, agenda."

"They're pack hunters," Hannibal managed to say, returning Will's words back to their owner.

"Yours was more like a ghost. It was behind every crack of your mask."

Will fished Hannibal's other hand from water and droplets fell like a crash. Hannibal turned so that Will could hold both of his wrists more easily. "I tried to track down the personality, the point of view behind your words. To see who changed you before I could." Will's eyes bore into his, scooping until they hit bottom. Hannibal wanted him to take more. "But there was no one else, was there?"

"Only you, Will," he said, captured.

"A version of me," Will said, taking a step back. Hannibal made a move to follow him, but Will was back, a white towel in his hand. "There is a story about a man who spent forty years in a dream. He met his wife, he built his family, he had a life. But it had all been nothing but a dream he had for one night." Will's hands were gentle as they took water from him. "How long was it for you?"

Hannibal didn't argue. Nothing was a dream, but words were too narrow to pour the world in them. Even the towel felt a little abrasive against his scars. He wished Will would take the layer away and use his claws, make new scars.

"Long enough."

"For me to see you?"

"For you to see yourself."

"Is that why I died?"

Water spread around the cotton of the sheet like a halo fit for Will, pink from blood. Ribs creaked under Hannibal's hands, unresponsive, he didn't know how long.

Hannibal found his hand over Will's heart. It was pounding, eternal.

"You tossed a coin," Hannibal said softly, voice the weightless fall held in amber.

"We called for different sides," Will said. "Why do it again?"

A helpless sort of ache washed over Hannibal. The hunger was so strong that it was paralyzing. Will had abandoned the layer. His thumb directly jammed over his scar, over his pulse. They were locked in their heart beats, linked together.

"What do you feel, Will?" Hannibal whispered.

"I feel..." Will paused, eyes closed, teetering. "A quiet sense of power."

"What would you do with it?"

Will opened his eyes. They were searching, so Hannibal pulled him in, into the Norman Chapel lit with candles and a skull dancing on the floor. Will was at home. He walked through the rows of chairs and stopped in front of the door to the altar, now left ajar.

Will tipped it completely open; the hinge creaked. He looked up, to the ceiling where candle light didn't reach. "There are many unlit corridors in your mind," he said.

"As they would be in yours."

"You see me."

"Always."

Will stood on the top of the stairs, glowing like the wings of white swan. Hannibal wanted to kneel down and worship. If Will would let him.

"I want everything," Will said, appalled at the streak of dark possessiveness inside him, yet it didn't stop him. It only made him step further, plunge deeper. "You'll give it to me."

Will was glorious. Looking down, sure of his place, demanding.

"I will," Hannibal said, breathless.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you guys enjoyed surprise Hannibal pov. All comments are greatly appreciated. Please help me keep going!

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

2:36 p.m.

It had been a shock to see the ghost and see his own face on it, the sudden insight like a dissonant cord that tied up all the other notes together. It was the squelching of flesh and blood giving under his hands, the coppery smell so thick and real that he might as well have killed these men and women all by himself. Will imagined living in that vividity for years and years, the illusion completely replacing the reality. And then waking up from it.

Hannibal looked worshipful and awed as he promised everything, but Will heard hooves clicking against the floor. He saw himself sitting astride on the back of the ravenstag, clad in black and washed in blood. The ghost regarded him with a curious expression, looking wordly and timeless and puzzled at why Will was standing in his place. Will felt a dizzying sensation of being switched and dragged Hannibal close, kissing him hard.

Hannibal made a startled noise, clutching at Will's collar. His legs moved backward as Will pushed him back, but he was not really conscious of it. Hannibal blinked dazedly up as he hit the bed and fell on it, Will trapping him under his arms.

It filled Will with such awful tenderness, the way Hannibal blanked out a little whenever Will touched him. It also hurt.

"I still hate it that I'm not the one who changed you," Will said as he stroked Hannibal's hair, letting it fall in disarray. It made Hannibal's face look deceptively soft, like he could have been some harmless kindergarten teacher in another life.

"But you like me like this," Hannibal said, leaning into the touch, smiling like a cat who got the canary.

"Like what?"

"Waiting," Hannibal said. "Hungry for whatever you'll feel like giving me."

"You're always hungry."

"But I'm not trying to take control."

Will opened his mouth, about to scoff because Hannibal without control felt like an absurd idea.

Then he remembered how once upon a time, Hannibal had shoved an ear down his throat with calculating eyes, and had to admit that yes, relatively speaking, this Hannibal was a mess.

"You want me to take control. You like it when I exert my power over you," Will said, shaking his head. "Why?"

"Because I want you to know precisely what kind of effect you have on me," Hannibal said, looking blissful. "And you do come up with the most wonderful ideas."

Will felt a small twinge in his heart, knowing that those ideas probably didn't belong to him.

"Well then," he said, riding Hannibal's sweater up. Will enjoyed the way Hannibal's attention snapped back to him. "I wonder how long you can stand still for me."

3:13 p.m.

The answer to the question turned out to be: *Not very long.* In Hannibal's defense, he had stood very still when he had a presence of mind to do so. It was just that he had come rather fast, at which point he'd turned into a clingy octopus.

Will couldn't really say anything about coming too fast, since he hadn't done so well in holding it together either. Simply having an another cock to rub against had driven him over the edge, easier than he had thought it possible when Hannibal was straining under him with his blood bitten lips and curled toes.

Will felt drowsy as Hannibal's ribs moved up and down in a steady rhythm under his hand. Hannibal had his nose buried in Will's neck, breathing in deeply, and everything was warm with their limbs tangled. It was perfect for sleep. He could deal with dried semen later on.

"Come on," said the attempted murder who had disturbed his sleep last night. "Let's take a shower. We need to go somewhere."

Will groaned. "Whatever it is, can't we go tomorrow?"

"I have a surprise for you."

"I feel like I have been surprised to last for my life time in the last twenty hours."

Hannibal kissed him on the cheek, easily picking him up to sit upright. "I have a huge faith in you. Surely you can take one more surprise."

Will considered dramtically flopping over Hannibal's shoulders and making the man drag him to the bathroom, but decided that he had some dignity left in him yet.

"I thought you wanted me to boss you around," Will complained, standing up. "Not the other way around."

"Indulge me," Hannibal gave him a quick grin.

Hannibal's indulgence ended up being typically thorough. Will was bathed and shampooed and rinsed, almost feeling like one of his dogs from the way he was cared for. Hannibal's hands worked magic around his scalp and tense muscles and he forgot to put up much protest.

"This wasn't a really good idea if you wanted me to be functional," Will said, letting Hannibal dry them both while sitting on the edge of the tub.

"You can sleep in the car," Hannibal promised.

5:27 p.m.

After all the fuss, Will had thought that Hannibal would've had something more dramtic planned than a cliff-side house. It then occurred to him that some dramatic people could be waiting in the house.

"Please tell me no one in there wants to murder us."

"You think I would do that?"

"Your idea of romance was eating me whole," Will told him flatly.

Hannibal conceded the point and deigned to enter the house first. Will looked around the place, thinking that the glass walls were damn impractical. Hannibal told him they could turn opaque, but why not use material that could actually offer privacy and warmth in the first place?

The sound of footsteps made him tense, getting ready. It was coming from the stairs.

"Hannibal!" said a bird like voice. "Did something happen? I didn't think you'd be-" Wide eyes. Fluttering lashes. "-coming tonight."

Will wondered- Will wondered many things. Will wondered if he was hallucinating again, if his encephalitis had returned without his knowledge. Then he wondered if this girl was just someone who looked very much like Abigail, all happy coincidence, and then he wondered if Hannibal, if Hannibal-

Hannibal was watching them like he wanted to soak up the moment, as if he was going to recreate it later stroke by stroke on paper.

That was when Will knew that this was real.

"Abigail," Will whispered, throat tight.

"Will," Abigail said, guilty, glad, scared, worried, her emotions whirling like a storm in a snow globe. She turned to Hannibal, seeking reassurance.

"He's safe," Hannibal said, giving what she needed. "You can trust him."

Abigail finally relaxed somewhat, and tentatively came down the last few steps. She stood in front of Will as if she didn't quite know what to do with him. Will separated the girl in front of him from the girl in his mind whose sunny smile actually reached her eyes, and remembered that they hadn't parted in the best of circumstances. He had hallucinated killing her after the sting of betrayal had made him feel cornered, and she had wildly accused him of the crime that he hadn't committed.

They each regarded one another as if the other was a wounded animal. They didn't know how they had negotiated their distance into a crushing hug, but when they did, Will was flooded with the smell of citrus and warmth. "Abigail," he said. "I'm so sorry."

Abigail burrowed into him, shuddering.

"I'll prepare dinner," Hannibal said quietly. The fading footsteps told Will that he was alone with Abigail now.

"I- I'm sorry," Abigail said, taking a step back from him after her shuddering stopped. "It's been some time since I interacted with anyone but Hannibal."

"It's okay," Will said distantly, mind in overdrive as he tried to reconstruct everything that he'd thought to have happened to fit in with this new development. "How have you been?"

"Idle," she said, her tone almost convincing. She managed a smile. "There's not much you can do when you're dead you now."

"Yeah," Will said, not knowing how else to respond.

"I... heard that you've been in the hospital," Abigail said, her words packed with unasked question.

"The Chesapeake Ripper had set me free," Will said. He saw the knowledge reflected in her eyes, that she knew exactly who and what she'd been staying with. Will didn't ask her how or since when. Instead he said, "What can I do for you?"

Abigail snapped her head up, defensive, wrankled that he might be seeing her as a damsel in distress. "I've been doing well with Hannibal," she said.

Will nodded. She was strong and smart, surviving when most people would have already faltered. He looked her in the eyes and said, "But I can help you take more."

Abigail's eyes flickered toward the kitchen Hannibal had disappeared to and back to his face.

"Trust me," Will said, internally wincing the moment the words left his mouth. That was a lot to ask for. "He brought me here so that you could ask for more."

Abigail didn't ask him why Hannibal would go through that in such a convoluted way

"He.. wants me to hunt with you," Abigail chose her words carefully, looking up at him through her lashes.

Will smiled tightly. "More like fising."

She swallowed, thinking. Then she leaned in, just like she had done in the hospital when she had confessed she'd felt powerful killing Nick Boyle. "Hannibal promised that he'd take me out of the country when things died down."

"Where you can live freely."

"Yeah," she said and looked down. "I want to walk down the street without everyone looking at me like I'm a freak or a monster. I want- I want my life back."

Will thought about reporters and juries and the people he'd thought to have his back, no one listening as he screamed the truth. "I'll make it happen faster," he said quietly.

She smiled at him, tremulous.

Chapter End Notes

Oh my god, I was blown away by everyone's response. I'm writing as quickly as I can. The end is nigh. Please see it through with me. Thank you so much!

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

6:23 p.m.

"You know, I always thought *I don't know whether to punch you or kiss you* was the thing that only happened in movies," Will said, locking the door behind him.

The three of them had had an awkward, but not entirely uncomfortable dinner together, one memorable thing being the wine Hannibal had served them. Will had dragged Hannibal to the nearest guest room as soon as the dinner was over, bursting with questions. Abigail had looked at them like they were a quarreling couple (which to be honest, held a degree of truth) and had volunteered to do the dishes.

"I gave you that wine, didn't I? You kept it all this time?" Will continued to say when Hannibal remained quiet, standing with his back against him. Will walked toward him and turned him around by the shoulder.

"I didn't know that it was an offense worthy of getting punched for," Hannibal said when avoidance no longer became an option.

"You left me believing that she was dead," Will said, thinking that it was a pity that Hannibal wasn't in his usual three-piece suit. This was the perfect time for the man's thick, pretentious tie to be used as a convenient leash to be yanked down.

Without the tie, Will had to use his hands to roughly pull Hannibal's face downward. The stubbles felt prickly against his palms, having gone unshaven longer than Hanniabl usually let it be.

Hannibal's eyes fluttered shut. He wound his arms around Will's back. "Am I about to get punched?"

Will gave it a due consideration. He thumped his head against Hannibal's chest instead, illiciting a small grunt but nothing more. "You're a dick," Will informed him. "You should've told me sooner. Or better yet, thought of a better plan than to frame me for her murder." Even as he said it, Will knew that he was telling the tiger to change its stripe. Hannibal would always be Hannibal. He *knew.* "You're forgiven. Not that you'd tell me you're sorry, you prick."

At his words, Hannibal made a desperate sound, something more fitting for an animal than a human, and lunged. Will was pushed backward, lending on a bed, attacked by a kiss that was sharp, sloppy, more an attempt to crawl inside him than for anything as blend as pleasure. Will had a precious five seconds to take a gasping breathe while Hannibal tore off both of their coats and dropped them down on the floor, and then it was on again. Despite the

ferociousness of the kiss, Will couldn't feel turned on, because the air was too filled with despair, so thick that it tasted like charcoal.

When Hannibal subsided at last, hair sticking to his forehead with sweat, Will adjusted them so that they could be lying side by side and asked, "Why does this feel like a good bye?"

Hannibal looked at him with watery eyes, wound wide open and blood gushing out. "What did you think would happen at the end of our promised hour?"

Shaken by the sight, Will reached out, trying to wipe out the unshed tear. "That you'd still want me around."

"Oh, dear Will," Hannibal said. The tears spilled out, too heavy, scalding the cut on his index finger. "I do want to be with you. Desperately."

"Where are you going?" Will asked, hushed voice.

"I'm not sure. Back to where I came from, I guess."

"What do you mean?"

"What did you think happened to me? To change me so?"

Will blinked his eyes, fast. He wasn't going to cry just because Hannibal was looking at him with such tender, aching feeling. "That you had a particularly vivid vision that woke you from your asshole way."

"Like the Ghost of Christmas?" Hannibal's lips twitched, amused despite his cheeks still shining wet.

"Yes."

"Fitting," he said. "But I'm afraid I'm your ghost from the future, not the Scrooge. Twenty four hours was all that I've been granted with."

"Granted?" Will said, incredulous. "You're not a Cinderella."

The absurdity of the statement hit them with more force than they had expected, their vivid imagination conjuring up an image of Hannibal with a tiara and glass shoes and long, flowery dress. Hannibal was the first to snicker, desperation tipping him off easier, and soon they were laughing, deep and guttral and breathless.

"Oh my God," Will said. "You want that fucking glass shoes, don't you? Fucking glass house on a fucking cliff."

"Of course I do," Hannibal said, faux snooty, barely holding in his smirk. "I do have a matching plastic suit."

"What, seriously?"

"How else am I supposed to keep my three-piece suits clean while I murder around?"

They collapsed into another feat of laughter. Hannibal had his eyes crinkled shut, looking like a young boy. Will wanted to lick that laughter up along with his tears and keep it in his belly, let it live inside him forever. So he did just that and peppered Hannibal with thousand small kisses until he sopped everything up.

"Yes, I'm Cinderella," Hannibal said with a straight face as he finally pulled himself together. Then he's face softened into something gentle. "When the time comes, the magic would be undone. You'd have Hannibal Lecter without the memory of today and anything that happened afterward."

It felt like being punched in the gut, and Will's stomach was already strained from laughing. God, Will couldn't even remember how Hannibal was like before today. Who could dare take this away from him when he'd only just gotten a taste?

"Who made this happen?" Will asked. Even he didn't know what he'd do if he met the one responsible for it.

"God, the Devil," Hannibal shrugged. "Who knows?"

"You don't know?"

"I had much more important thing to think about," he grinned, that besotted fool of a look.

"Why did you show me Abigail?" Will asked, trying to shake away the pain in his chest.

"I want you to make your way toward the victory you deserve," Hannibal said. "And you can't make an informed choice without having full facts."

Will saw himself through Hannibal's eyes, the vision Hannibal gladly shared. He was the first light of the morning hitting the bottom of the dark valley, the muse responsible for all the wonders in the world, the terrific God who slaughtered thousands with his whimsy. Will shuddered, delighted and terrified, and whispered, "Tell me my options."

"So you can choose both and neither?" Hannibal asked with a smile.

Will returned it, feeling like he was filled with fire. "You know me best."

Hannibal shifted so that Will laid on his arm. He brought them closer, breath mingling.

"You can leave with him," Hannibal said. "You, him, Abigail, all together."

"Where would we go?"

"Oh, I trust him to be resourceful," he said, looking wistful. "I would have liked to show you Florence."

"Is it beautiful?"

"It's where I became a man." Will saw Hannibal, wild beast of a thing finally slacking its thirst for vengence, turning itself into an elegant artist of death. "You saw the Chapel at least. I'm grateful for it."

Will closed his eyes, trying not to feel like everything was slipping away. "What's the other option?"

"You can arrest him," Hannibal continued. He brushed one of Will's curls behind his ear, tucking it in. "I had kept Miriam Lass here. If memory serves, he hadn't the chance to properly destory all trace of her here."

"What about Abigail?" Will asked. He didn't want to listen anymore, but he had to. "Who'd protect her without you?"

"She has you. You can blame everything on me. Collaborate your story together. The Bureau won't care much for her when they have the Chesapeake Ripper," he paused, thinking of a faraway things, then gave a wry grin. "And I believe Alana would be incensed after finding out how much of a fool I made out her. She'd be on the war path to protect Abigail."

"He can escape," Will pointed out. "Then Abigail's life would be in danger."

"Oh, Will," Hannibal's voice was fond, admonishing. "You know how much power you hold over me."

"He's not you."

"No," Hannibal said, sounding so happy to pronounce that one word. "But I think he'd be amenable to certain quid pro quos."

Will mulled over the two options Hannibal had presented to him, and felt his stomach tightening in dread.

"I'd have everything but you."

"You have me Will," Hannibal insisted. "I'll always be in your thought."

"That's not the same and you know it," Will said sharply. He digged his fingers into the arm that was under him, frustrated with nowhere to bent. "How do you know you won't still be here? If I go through this and you're still here, your life would be ruined."

"You're worth everything," Hannibal kissed him on the forehead, careless of his pain. "I'd gladly take being caged forever in Hell if I could keep you."

"Why are you doing this? And don't tell me it's all for me. You're not that selfless."

At Will's sharp assessment of him, Hannibal tilted his head down. His eyes were burning, filled with obsessive devotion that dripped like poison. "I'm doing this, so that he can't have you."

It took a moment for Will to understand that Hannibal was jealous of *himself* of all people.

"I can leave with him," Will threatened. *The possessive bastard.*

"And he'd be my ghost," Hannibal countered. His eyes were slitted like a peak through Hell. "He doesn't know yet how much you're worth. He'll put his freedom and life above you. And you'll think of me." A kiss on his forehead. "You'll search for me." A kiss on his eyelids. "Yet you won't find me anywhere." He sealed his pronouncement with a kiss on his mouth, a wedding vow, all slick heat. "You're mine, Will."

"Fuck," Will said harshly, wondering what the fuck was wrong with him that he found it hot and romantic. He wanted to bend Hannibal over and fuck him right then and there, but they didn't have the time. The damnable thing. There were still so many things he needed to know.

"Hannibal," Will said his name as a way to balance himself, and realized from the jubilant look in Hannibal's eyes that this was the first time he'd ever used his first name. Miffed that he'd inadvertently ended up rewarding Hannibal, Will covered Hannibal's mouth with his hand even as he asked, "What happened the last time?"

Unfazed, Hannibal simply licked his palm up and proceeded to suck his fingers. Will let him because it pleased him.

"You seduced me," Hannibal said even as he was teasing a small nick in Will's finger with his tongue. "Don't make that face, Will. You knew what you were doing when you came to my office."

Will motioned Hannibal to go on with one hand while wiping the throughly sucked fingers on Hannibal's pants. He knew it would bother Hannibal. God forbid his clothes suffer even though he wouldn't mind it in his mouth.

"And you succeeded," Hannibal said, exasperated and fond. "I was completely bewitched. I thought you wanted to be with me." He swallowed, tone turning a bit darker. "Then I found that you planned to capture me with Jack Crawford. I thought every moment we shared was a lie. I was hurt beyond measure, incensed that I let myself be vulnerable like that."

It was an old hurt, not even something that Will had caused, but he wanted to make it better. He wiggled closer until they were nose to nose.

"What happened next?"

"I forgave you," Hannibal spoke like a sigh. "It happened to me without my decision. And I couldn't stand how much you changed me."

"You didn't notice before that?"

"I was arrogant enough to think I could shape you to suit me without changing myself. I wanted to cut you out after your betrayal. So I gut you open, slit Abigail's throat in front of you and killed her."

Will covered his stomach without meaning to. He could picture it all too vividly, the phantom pain too sharp.

"I'm ashamed to admit it, but I don't learn without harsh lessons," Hannibal said as he touched Will's hand on his stomach. "He won't learn how precious you're if you leave with him."

A laughter punched out of Will's mouth. God, it was hilarious when Hannibal was being transparent.

"You're manipulating me," he accused, voice light.

"Yes," Hannibal admitted, shameless. He looked like he wanted to sop up Will's laughter too. Will invited him with a tilt of his head, which Hannibal took. As they parted he said, "I know in the end, you'll find a way to put me back into my proper place."

"And where's that?"

"Under you." A soft peck. "Worshipping you."

"You're terrible."

Hannibal took it like the biggest compliment. "Always."

Will sighed, burying his head in the crook of Hannibal's neck. "I should've killed you while I had the chance."

Hannibal nuzzled Will's head, pulling him tightly into his arms. "I share the sentiment."

They stayed like that, tangled together, cuddling, until the clock hit 7:25 p.m. After that, Hannibal instructed Will to take the syringe from his coat, saying that it'd put him to sleep for about 5 hours. He wanted Will to have all his choices, and wanted to prevent a situation where he'd wake up as his previouse self without his memories and force Will to chose one way or another.

The syringe had been wrapped in a poket handkerchief that gradiented from blue to red around the edge, the design precisely the opposite of the handkerchief that Will had wrapped his stolen scalpel with. Will showed them to Hannibal and the man became inordinately pleased, magnanimously telling him to keep everything, the two handkerchiefs, the scalpel, the empty syringe. Will told him he'd been planning to anyway.

"You have to shower before confronting me," Hannibal said as he gave his final instruction. "My nose is incredibly sharp, and I'll know you've been here if I smell you."

"Do I have to shower you, too?"

"Preferably, but I could wake up if you do that. Change me and put on some perfume on me to mask my scent."

"Hmm, you'd like that wouldn't you?" Will asked. "Me changing you while you're unconscious and helpless, mine to do whatever I like?"

Hannibal whimpered and closed his eyes. "Don't tempt me now, Will."

"Your fault," Will pecked him on the nose.

Hannibal laid down on the bed while Will kneeled beside him, needle poised at the crook of his elbow. It felt like Will was about to kill him. Hannibal probably loved that, the bastard.

The clock ticked and ticked, rushing to shout that it was 7:29 p.m. Will's heart pounded, lurching, sick. His hands were clammy.

"If you wake up and you're still here," Will said, voice shaky, trying to hide it, then giving up. "I'm cutting you out for a week."

Hannibal gave him a besotted smile, so happy that Will knew that'd be the worst punishment for him.

"I'm yours, Will," Hannibal whispered as the needle plunged into his vein. "Always."

Will gave a strangled cry, tears falling after all his effort to stop them.

"And I'm yours."

Will kissed him until he went slack in his arms.

Chapter End Notes

Haha, I'm updating twice today because these two idiots had been whispering to each other all day long in my head. Suffer with me, and please keep sending me comments! Next chapter is the final epilogue and I need you guys so that I could stay emotionally strong and write it. Thank you for all your support!

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal woke up with his head pounding and his mouth dry. He felt disoriented and weak, like he had been forcefully sedated. He tried to rub his forehead to ease the pain, then realized that his hands were tied together behind his back, cuffed. He blinked, feeling soft sheet under his cheek. He was lying sideway on his bed. His right shoulder didn't ache under the weight, which meant that he hadn't been in this position for long. He wondered who could've had the audacity to leave him back in his own house after attacking him, then almost gagged as the scent of the atrocious aftershave Will liked to wear hit him, unprepared.

A pair of strong arms pulled him up into a sitting position and offered a glass of water. Hannibal drank, blind. If Will had wanted to kill him, he already had plenty of time to do so.

"Did you," Hannibal opened his mouth after he drank enough water to feel like his parched throat was made of living tissues instead of dry sandpapers. He had to compose himself so that he wouldn't dry heave at the smell. "Did you pour your aftershave all over my body?"

"Yes," came the simple answer.

"May I ask why?"

"You puked," Will answered sweetly. "I thought you'd appreciate my aftershave more than the smell of puke."

Hannibal doubted it, as he was hoping that he could've been born with a less acute nose for the first time in his life.

"Next time, please refrain from doing so."

"I will," Will said as he took the cup away. Then more softly, tentatively, he asked, "Do you remember what happened?"

Hannibal regulated his breathing, trying to concentrate. It was also in his best interest to remember. "I remember," he said, licking his lips. "I remember, sitting in my office."

"Were you waiting for me?"

"Your appointment time is still open."

Will nodded and walked to sit on the chair he had dragged in front of the bed. The room was mercifully dark save for the lamp near the bed. Hannibal didn't think he could stand bright white light at the moment.

"What else do you remember?" Will questioned.

"Nothing," he said, trying not to feel unnerved at the blank space in his head, like a film carelessly cut to black. "I guess you drugged me in my office?"

Will's face shuttered. "Yes."

Will fell silent after that. Rather than trying to strike a conversation, Hannibal took the opportunity to study Will closer. He thought it'd be the key to understanding the situation he was in. Will was dressed in all black from head to toe, the jacket form fitting, the shoes gleaming at the end of the crossed legs. The shaggy hair he'd seen at the kitchen was neatly trimmed and slicked back, save for the one curl falling into his forehead. His eyes had also changed, the anger and confusion Hannibal had seen in the kitchen reigned in tight. The eyes were now radiating faint echo of tiredness and resentment, along with something deeper and darker, something Hannibal couldn't decipher, for it had been sunk out of sight.

"I discovered a truth about myself when I tried to have you killed," said Will, breaking Hannibal's concentration.

"That doing bad things to bad people makes you feel good," Hannibal returned smoothly, as if he'd been expecting this conversation all along.

"Yes," Will said.

"Do you fantisize about killing me?"

Will smiled and leaned back, interlacing his fingers. "What makes you think I stopped at a fantasy?"

Hannibal paused. This Will was going above and beyond his expectation. He thought Will would have purged his urge to make a life threatening confrontaion with him after that night in the kitchen. Hannibal flexed his hands. He could easily break out of the cuff if he chose to, but he was curious to see where Will was going with this.

"How do you plan to kill me?"

"I already did," said Will. "You're in the aftermath."

At Hannibal's uncomprehending look, Will explained. "A day has already passed. It's 12:41 a.m. You're in Baltimore, Maryland and your name is Hannibal Lecter."

"How kind of you to remind me," Hannibal responded automatically while the cogs in his heads were busy turning. There was no need for Will to lie about something so easy to check as time. The lie wouldn't last long enough for Will to do anything about it. And if what he was saying was true... "What did you do, Will?"

"I've been thinking," Will said, standing up. He took a step closer to Hannibal. Hannibal wondered if Will would try to wring his neck, but he didn't do anything as drastic. He simply put his hand on Hannibal's shoulder, eyes intent on his face. Hannibal stood still, staring. The hand wasn't in a particularly threatening area, but Will wasn't the type to touch people casually. Afterall, Hannibal himself had been careful with touching Will lest the man's barrier

go up. The gesture had to mean something. While Hannibal discarded one theory after another as an explanation, something like disappointment flashed through Will's eyes.

"I've been thinking that I shouldn't have sent Matthew after you," Will said, face clearing as if nothing had happened. Hannibal bookmarked the moment in his mind. "What's my reckoning worth if you don't die by *my* design?"

Will returned to his seat, not really caring about Hannibal's answer.

"What was your design?" Hannibal prompted.

"Poisoning you," Will answered.

Hannibal quirked his brow. "Less intimate than I'd expected."

"Dr. Lecter," Will said, the disappointment in his voice now both genuine and falsified. "I thought you knew me."

"What do I not know about you?"

"Why would I give you the intimacy, when that is what you seek from me?"

"You want to deny me."

"I'm feeling really angry at my loss right now," Will said, smile tight. The dark torrent of a look in his eyes were promising. Hannibal could see him unleashing it to the unsuspecting world at large.

"The friendship we had before is gone," he adopted a soft tone.

"Yes," Will said, eyes far away. Then they took a mischievous shine, hiding away his more tender side. Hannibal both wanted Will to be more mercurial so that he could be able to catalog each and every wide variation of Will's face, and to be more steady so that he could examine each feeling with all the time in the world, as one should do when they were faced with a timeless masterpiece. "I knew being poisoned would irritate the hell out of you," Will said as he leaned his chin on his hand.

"How would it have irritated me?"

"Firstly, I wouldn't have claimed you as my victim. It'd be impersonal." He ticked off one finger. "Secondly, the world at large would have thought you'd have died a mundane death. It would have appeared to be a simple heart attack. *Poor Dr. Lecter, the stress must have gotten to him. Though thanks God the Chesapeake Ripper has already been caught.*" He ticked off two fingers, grinning at the minor twitch in Hannibal's eyebrow. "Thirdly, your meat wouldn't have been edible. I might have tried to cook you up otherwise." He spread all his fingers wide at this point. "How well I'm doing?"

If intimacy was what Will was trying not to give him, Will was failing horribly at delivering it and he knew it. The amount of thought Will had put into Hannibal's supposed death was almost flattering.

"Did you nurse me back into health?"

"In a way," Will said. "Oh, I changed you, by the way. Hope you don't mind. Sweaty clothes are horrible."

Hannibal didn't look down to check. "What made you change your mind?"

"I guess you're not the only one who wants to wind someone up and watch them go."

"You're playing a dangerous game, Will."

"That's the beauty of it, isn't it?" Will gave him a daring smile and stood up, brushing off imaginary lints on his suit. "I made the courtesy of cancelling your every appointment for the rest of the week. You need your rest. You've almost died like, three times now?" Will asked as he patted himself down, producing a single key. The key to Hannibal's handcuff.

"Do you need this?" Will asked.

"Yes," Hannibal said, just to see what Will would do. Will nodded and simply dropped it off at his lap.

"See you soon, Dr. Lecter," Will said as he walked away.

-

Two days later, Hannibal was still pondering upon what exactly Will Graham had done to him during the period his memory wasn't reliable.

Hannibal had checked his phone and found out that true to his words, Will had texted his patients about cancelling appointments. The puzzling thing was that there had been an outgoing call to the restaurant *Gallant*, and Caroline had assured him that she saw him there with 'a delectable young man'.

Will had lied to him about poisoning him in his office, and it was uncertain if Will had even poisoned him in the first place. Not knowing what exactly had happened was irritating, which led him to wonder if this was all part of Will's design.

After his altercation with Will, Hannibal had found out that all the meat in his kitchen was missing, and that he was now short of two of his sweaters, pants and handkerchiefs. He'd also been dismayed to find out that Will had took the bottle of wine he'd given Hannibal a few months ago. It seemed like Will had been truly dedicated in making Hannibal's life miserable in small and petty way. Hannibal wasn't exactly happy with the result, but appreciated the thought put into each action nonetheless. Now if only he could channel Will's darkness into more fitting medium.

Preoccupied as he was, Hannibal didn't hear a SWAT team surrounding his house. He only realized the trouble he was in when he found Jack Crawford at his doorstep, armed with a gun and a smug and angry look, saying "You're under arrest, Dr. Lecter."

"You're making a mistake, Jack," Hannibal said as he submitted to the second handcuff of the week. From what he had observed from Will, chance to escape was more likely to come during transportation.

He watched with interest as Will appeared from a throng of people. Will and Jack exchanged a heated, but old argument with their eyes, but Will ended up coming to stand by Hannibal's side while Jack had his gun pointed at Hannibal's head, standing just shy of a distance where whispered conversation couldn't be heard.

"If you escape, contact Abigail first or hurt her or pressure her in anyway, that'd be the last time you see me," Will said without preamble.

So they found her. Hannibal stored that information in the back of his head. "Is that supposed to be a threat, Will?" Hannibal murmured.

"How did I find her? What really happened that night? Who will answer you these questions if I'm gone?" Will said softly, mirroring their conversation in the kitchen, although he'd changed his aftershave into something more woodsy. "You'll never find me. If I have to, I'm willing to kill myself to spite you."

From the look in his eyes, Hannibal knew that Will wasn't being hyperbolic. Feigning an unaffected look he said, "Threat alone is rarely effective."

Will gave him a blinding smile, though barely a muscle moved in his face. He whispered, "If you stay, Dr. Lecter, I promise that I'll find a way to get you out myself."

Hannibal's face turned blank, the blindsiding answer making him unable to come up with an expression. Will gave him a small nod and turned his back to him, leaving Hannibal to his own devise.

Hannibal stayed put, because he was curious what Will would do.

-

The Baltimore State Hospital for Criminally Insane should have been maintaining top security with the arrival of its new celebrity inmate. However, the temporary dean of the hospital had been beyond swamped with workloads, what with hiring a new nurse to replace Matthew Brown, dealing with a lawsuit that Will Graham had filed against the care he'd received during his stay, and trying to maintain efficiency with the generally understaffed situation of the hospital.

During the chaos, a former patient of Dr. Lecter managed to sneak in a visit. Hannibal gave Randall Tier words of encouragement and suggestions, his demeanor that of a perfect, attentive psychiatrist. At the end of the visit, Randall Tier came to the conclusion that it'd be best for him to have Will Graham as his first target.

Hannibal Lecter laid back on his cot, waiting for Will's next move.

-

Will came to him the next day, a case file in his hand.

Hannibal interlaced his fingers on top of the table. "Did Jack Crawford send you?"

"I suggested, and he approved. He knows that I'm at my sharpest when I have you in my head," Will said, nonchalant as he dragged the chair back.

"How is Abigail?" Hannibal asked.

"She's okay," Will said. "But more than that, you'd have to wait until she makes the first contact. Let her have her choice."

Will put the file on the table without pushing it toward Hannibal, a card laying faced down in the game of pocker. However, Hannibal's eyes were drawn more to the scraped knuckles at the back of Will's hand.

"Curious?" Will quirked a smile.

"Yes," Hannibal said. "May I ask what happened?"

"Oh, just your regular mugging attempt," Will's voice was light, but his face told a different story. A flash of righteous violence made Hannibal straigthen his spine. "I managed to land a few good punches, but he got away."

"I'm glad to hear that you're alright."

"Thank you." A sly look. "Honestly, the way he snarled at me was more animal than human."

I know what you did, the message was loud and clear.

"I hope he'd get caught soon," Hannibal said congenially.

"Well, you know how it is, Dr. Lecter," Will sighed, his expression devoid of worry, even slightly amused. "I don't think I'll ever see this mugger again."

"Indeed," Hannibal said, feeling suddenly flushed, coveteous like a man standing in front of a banquet he could only smell but couldn't dine on. "May I see the file?"

"Of course."

Their hands didn't brush.

-

Will was regular and faithful in his visit, always a case file in his hand. He was a changed man, more sure of himself, more ruthless, more sanguine about death, but somehow more kind.

Hannibal at first thought that this was the change that he had wrought in Will and felt proud of it, but then he saw the way Will looked at him sometimes.

Will himself didn't seem to realize what he was doing, but it became obvious enough for Hannibal: There was someone else in Will's mind, and Will was using Hannibal to see them again.

A few days later, bored with the repetition of seeing Will delve into the minds of lesser criminals, Hannibal slipped the cuffs, uncoiled himself from his seat and strangled Will with his hand.

Will didn't put up a fight. Hannibal realized that it wasn't because Will didn't have the strength or the skill to do so. It was because Will didn't want to leave any of his marks on Hannibal. Nothing to remember him by than a fading memory in his head, not even a burst of adrenalin. An empty chair that would never be filled.

Clever boy, Hannibal thought fondly as the orderlies knocked him out.

Will didn't visit him for three weeks after the incident. He briefly toyed with the idea of breaking out - it was almost insulting, those gaps in security- but decided to wait it out.

Hannibal felt no need to repeat that particular experiment.

-

"You're fostering dependency," Hannibal remarked after Will started to show up regularly once again, although the word he wanted to use was *co*-dependency. He refrained from using it as his privacy had become non-existant with the return of Frederick Chilton as the head of the hospital.

"What does Frederick think about that?"

Will tilted his head, understanding the question for what it is. Fostering dependency on Hannibal's side was only natural and to be expected. A beast needed to be tamed if one didn't wanted to get bitten.

But Will, Will was tying himself up right along side Hannibal, walking straight down to the abyss even though Hannibal wasn't in the position to properly guide him. Hannibal saw a glimpse of Will's bloodied hands in Randall Tier's disappearance and Clark Ingram's sudden confession, the information brought to him by Will like a cat inexplicably dropping dead animals at one's feet, either a taunt or a gift. Hannibal was caught between feeling disappointed that he couldn't be en scene, seeing the cause and the process of Will's change in minute detail, and intrigued as to how much further Will was willing to push himself, this little show of his.

"Dr. Chilton is very content with our deal," Will answered.

"What kind of deal have you struck?"

"Two years of observation, and a book with my insight in his name."

"A very lucrative deal."

"Yes," Will said. "He has everything where he wants it."

-

"What offended you more, his overuse of swear words, or his overuse of finger quotes?"

Will's question was refreshing after hearing Frederick rant about *Just how in the world did you get him to swallow his own tongue?!* all morning, although Hannibal had to admit that he rarely found Will not to be refreshing.

"He reached his hands through the bar to inflict 'louder' quotes," Hannibal offered with a bland voice.

"Unacceptable," Will quipped dryly.

"You don't have the file today," Hannibal observed.

"I have all the necessary information in my head," Will said, tapping at the side of his head. "It's not like I brought you anything during our therapy."

Will's eyes were laughing. Hannibal saw that the explanation was nothing more than a flimsy excuse to cover that this was a friendly visit. Hannibal leaned forward, delighted. There had been a moment, as he closed his eyes to focus on the symphony of the gurgling and scraping sound his ex-neighbor had made, where Hannibal thought that Will might try to punish him for this incident in a misguided attempt to make Hannibal *good*.

How mistaken he was. How unwarranted his suspicion had been. Will was above something as banal as binary.

"I'd have to rely on your mind, then," Hannibal said.

"I'd like you to."

-

"May I sit?" Will asked as he walked up the aisle to stand in front of Hannibal.

Hannibal had been sitting in the Norman Chapel in his palace with Abigail by his side (he thought she would appreciate it since she was now in an art major according to one of her letters). The boy who had been singing about God at the altar stopped abruptly, leaving a ringing silence in its place.

"You're real," Hannibal said, half statement, half question, although he was quite pleased. *How did you get here?*

"Reality is subjective," Will gave him a quick grin.

Behind his back, Hannibal felt a foreign presence. He turned and found an indefinable cluster of light standing in the corner. Will's face was soft as he regarded it.

"Who is it?" Hannibal asked, his good mood smothered like fire meeting water. *The light*. It was important to Will, pivotal. Even though the light was far away, Hannibal felt shadowed by it.

Will shook his head, remaining silent. He took his seat.

After a few tense moment, the song resumed.

-

Georgia Manchen had died in a chamber of fire. She would have died without pain, the temperature of the fire so high that it would have fried her nerves before the pain could hit her.

Frederick Chilton wouldn't be afforded with the same mercy. Hannibal planned to roast him slowly. Chilton would watch as his face slowly melted into unrecognizable mess.

After Hannibal had killed his fifth neighboring inmate, Chilton had snapped and banned anyone from visiting him. Chilton had gloated about how he would never see his 'boyfriend' again, and Hannibal thought that he was right in his assessment that Chilton's tongue would make an excellent dish.

While Hannibal was pondering upon the spice he would use, the orderly came and told him that he had his call from his lawyer.

"Hello," Hannibal said, wondering what had brought this change of mind in the balding man to actually work deligently for his client's defence.

"Dr. Lecter," the voice said, and Hannibal almost slipped out his name. "I believe you would know how to fake an appropriate conversation?"

Hannibal swallowed, held himself steady. "I didn't expect a call," he said in a low voice.

"It was very rude of Frederick, wasn't it?" Will said. "This is between you and me. He can't wield me like his weapon."

I'll cut you only when I want to.

"Yes," Hannibal said, feeling warm. "Very rude, indeed."

-

It had been a year since Hannibal's capture, and in the eyes of the public, Will Graham was the fairy tale of a man who had bested the Devil. He was the man who never faltered in his pursuit of justice even though he had been wrongfully incarcerated, who continued to apprehend criminals despite his own trauma. Freddie Lounds had spun gold, buoyed with Will's promise of a book deal, and Jack Crawford's reliance on Will Graham was heavier than ever since the profiler had worked as his crutch during Bella's decline in health and after her eventual death. Jack willingly turned a blind eye to Will's unorthodox working relationship with Hannibal Lecter as it only seemed to make Will steadier and sharper anyway.

No one suspected anything when Will suggested using Hannibal as a bait to lure out the Dragon.

Except for Hannibal.

"I need you, Hannibal," Will said, his smile coy, and Hannibal knew that Will was about to make his promise come true.

He'd never felt happier in his life.

-

"It's beautiful."

Will was magnificent, moon bathing him in a soft glow as he smiled with teeth full of blood. After being teased for years with sly smiles and inuendoes and occasional scent of blood, Hannibal could've wept with joy at witnessing Will's savage grace in action.

Will took Hannibal's breath away as he turned gentle in the next second, pulling him into a hug. It'd been such a long time since anyone had touched him in more than a perfunctory manner, and this was Will. He'd been so hungry for him, always so close but separated, and here Will was, embracing him willingly.

Lost in delirious delight, Hannibal almost didn't hear Will asking, "What would you do if I threw us both off the cliff now?"

Several things passed through Hannibal's mind after he registered the question, starting with why Will would want to do such a thing, but he pushed them all aside to answer it properly.

"I'll let you, because I like seeing where you lead me," Hannibal said, feeling peace settle into him. "But I'll not allow us to die tonight."

It was then that Will lunged, not to push them toward death, but to pull them back. Will kissed him like this was a home coming after long winter, seeking comfort. Longing came off of him like waves, like lightning fire. Hannibal realized how tightly Will had been controlling his passion during the past year, throwing mere morsels when all he'd wanted to do was pour. Hannibal's knees buckled to be faced with the entirety of it, unprepared.

Will spread Hannibal on the altar in the Chapel, sucking air straight out of his lung, returning it all the more sweeter for his torment. With hazy eyes, Hannibal saw the undefinable cluster of light engulfing Will from behind, as if it wanted to pull Will away from Hannibal, but couldn't bare to separate itself from Will to do so.

When they parted, Hannibal panted, aching, satiated, hungry for more.

"Would you say that you're mine, Hannibal?" Will asked, stroking his face.

"You know that the answer has always been yes," Hannibal said. He closed his eyes, leaning into the touch. "Are you?" He asked. He couldn't bear to open his eyes.

Will peppered him with kisses until he couldn't help but open his eyes. "Yes," Will said, smiling, earnest, loving. "But you'll always have to share me with him."

Chapter End Notes

I can't belive this story is finished. 9 chapters for 1 day and 1 chapter for 1 year, figures. Thank you so much for those of you who encouraged me as I wrote this fic. I've never felt so intense and out of control while writing.

If you're interested in my rambling, Chapter 1 and 9 hand been set from the beginning, but originally, I wasn't planning on Will and Hannibal kissing, and Will was supposed to fall from the cliff with Hannibal at the end of the epilogue.

Then suddenly, Hannibal wanted Will to take a lead on everything, and Will was like 'Why can't I kiss Hannibal? I'm doing it' since Chapter 3 and the rate came dangerously close to skyrocketing and Will refused to repeat history at the end.

God, I'm still feeling emotional over these two. Please come to me and tell me about what you thought about the story. I'm dying to hear it!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!